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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to examine the journalism work of James Gordon Bennett, who founded the "New York Herald" in the 1830s, and to determine the nature of his coverage of religion before, during, and after the "Moral War" waged in 1840 against Bennett's popular newspaper. In addition, the study analyzed what Bennett's religion coverage reveals about the man, his work, and his times. A content analysis was conducted of randomly selected issues of Bennett's "New York Herald" from 1836 to 1844. Each issue in the sample was read and all items, exclusive of paid advertisements, that mentioned a religion, religious person, or word commonly associated with religion was considered religious coverage. Each item was then coded using a content analysis scheme that called for recording the length, author, style of writing, geographic location of the newsworthy event or situation, the primary religion discussed in the item and the image of that religion created by the coverage. Examination of the 224 religion items identified in the study indicates that religion coverage in the paper was more complex and less easily stereotyped as irreverent and critical of religion than some historians suggest, and that, although the coverage of religion did change over time, the change cannot be ascribed to an attempt to allay criticism of the paper that followed the Moral War. (DF)

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The Religion Journalism of James Gordon Bennett

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The New Jerusalem had changed.

At first most Americans were perfectly certain their new nation was an agrarian, Protestant republic, but as the United States moved toward its second half century they were becoming less certain.[1] The industrial revolution had come to America. Industrialization attracted immigrants both from rural areas of America and from Europe to growing urban centers and that meant change in the social fabric of society.

Unlike their predecessors, these immigrants were not necessarily associated with mainstream Protestant churches. Some had no religion; others were dissenting Protestants or even Roman Catholics from Ireland. As a result, the established Protestant churches that had enjoyed protection in many places through state constitutions and through common custom found themselves threatened by new, and sometimes strange, religions. In the face of this wave or immigration to urban areas, the de facto theocracy of an earlier era broke down. In its place was a new denominationalism that forced churches to compete among themselves for members and for money.[2]

In this new denominational system, survival and influence for churches depended on attracting voluntary members through evangelism and persuasion, but that required dealing with the common laborers who were flocking to the cities.[3] Like other professionals of their era, however, clergy from the established churches were not

certain that attention to the special needs of the urban poor was appropriate or worth the effort. Many found it easier to "huddle up to the self-made men of the middle, and when possible, the upper classes." In the process, they changed both their theology and the national ideology to one that despised the outcasts and licensed unregulated competition and economic gain. According to historian Martin Marty:

> ...The Protestant churches, shaped in a colonial America which had fostered commonwealth concepts, chartered individualism. A tradition which had exalted persons over property converted and justified absolute rights to property on the part of the industrious. The ideal of organismic community was overshadowed by a religion which largely accepted the laissez-faire competitive enterprise system....[5]

It was in this climate of economic, social and religious change that James Gordon Bennett began publishing his New York Herald. Unlike most businessmen and clergy of his day, Bennett was perfectly certain that talking to the common people could be just as fulfilling and perhaps even more economically rewarding than catering to the elite.

Although Benjamin Day's penny newspaper came first, Bennett expanded on the idea of a newspaper for the masses and took journalism to hew heights and/or depths depending on one's viewpoint. Not only did his newspaper adopt a more irreverent, satiric tone than Day's Sun, but it also came to include many more kinds of news.[6]

This combination of writing style and broad coverage of everything from crime, sex and violence to business and finance, politics

and religion made the paper immensely popular with the general public. In 1836, the Herald's first full year of publication, it already had 20,000 readers. But the same style and coverage that made the paper popular also opened up Bennett and his Herald to intense criticism.[7] In 1840, for example, other newspapers, business leaders and the clergy combined in a Moral War against Bennett and the Herald that went far beyond the periodic press wars that were a common feature of nineteenth century journalism. Most press wars of the era were rivalries fought personally between two editors through verbal attacks on each other in their newspapers and occasionally through fisticuffs and duels. The Moral War contained a personal element, but several newspapers combined against Bennett and his Herald ostensibly on moral grounds. These newspapers were joined by other businesses and by the clergy. The attack escalated into an economic boycott designed to drive the Herald out of business.[8]

Historians generally agree that economic motives were at least partially responsible for the Moral War. They also agree that one of Bennett's journalistic innovations was coverage of religion. But there is less unanimity among them on what that religion coverage was like or on whether it was a cause or effect of the Moral War.

In his classic history of American journalism, Mott writes:

> Certainly there was reason for criticism of the Herald. It exploited crime news. It seemed to delight in stories of illicit sex relations -- scandalous incidents recounted without names, some of them probably more or less fictitious. It shocked many readers by

> criticisms of the revival meetings of the times, and it was often disrespectful of the church and church leaders.[9]

Similarly, Bleyer comments:

> ...This emphasis on salacious material extended even to the Herald's treatment of biblical and religious subjects, including church services and revival meetings, to a degree that was regarded by many persons as blasphemous.[10]

Emery and Emery seem to agree that Bennett's irreverent treatment of religion contributed to the Moral War, but they also suggest Bennett's religion journalism changed in response to it. They explain:

> ...Bennett was accused of blasphemy (he had carried his saucy style into the coverage of religious news) and some of the leading clergy used their influence to make the boycott effective....
>
> ...Bennett solved the problem in characteristic manner. He sent his best reporters out to cover the church beat, including all religious meetings of any consequence. A man of little religious feeling, he had the news sense to understand that there was another neglected public worth cultivating. He also toned down some of the obvious charlatanism that made the Herald the symbol of public wickedness. The result was victory for Bennett.[11]

Like Emery and Emery, other historians also [illegible] Bennett's religion coverage did change after the Moral War. However, they report a change in amount and variety rather than tone. According to these historians, serious coverage of religion news occurred well before the Moral War. Furthermore, they conclude serious attention to the annual meetings of churches and religious organi-

zations, not the satirical criticism, contributed to the Moral War.[12] Seitz, for example, writes:

> One of the queerest kick-ups of the period developed when the Herald began printing religious news in 1839, covering the proceedings of church conferences and like uplifting affairs. Instead of welcoming the publicity, the clergy and the religious press treated it as sacrilege. Pastors denounced the infamous proceedings from their pulpits, and a pretty howdy-do resulted. Unabashed, the Herald continued to return good for evil and later began the custom of reporting popular sermons. This practice led to the establishment of a paid classification of religious notices that grew into a profitable feature, so much so that for many years it served as a real church directory.[13]

Because of the fragmentary and somewhat contradictory accounts of Bennett's religion journalism that were found in the available histories and biographies, this study was designed as a re-examination of Bennett's work to determine what his coverage of religion was like before, during and after the Moral War and what his religion coverage can tell us about the man, his work and his times. This re-examination seems particularly appropriate at this time because of recent concern by religious leaders and communication professionals about the appropriate relationship between religion and news.[14]

Methodology

This study is based primarily on a content analysis of a constructed month of issues of the Herald during 1836, the first full year of publication of the newspaper, and at two-year intervals through 1844. This procedure produced a random sample of 25 issues

for analysis in 1836, 1838 and 1840 and 30 issues for 1842 and 1844 when the paper was published seven days a week. The design provides a representative sample of religion news coverage during two years (1836 and 1838) before and after (1842 and 1844) the Moral War as well as during the year of the Moral War (1840).

Each issue included in the sample was read and all items, exclusive of paid advertisements that mentioned a religion, religious person, or word commonly associated with religion was considered religion coverage. This procedure identified 224 separate items dealing with religion. Each of these items was coded using a content analysis scheme that called for recording the length, author, style of writing, geographic location of the newsworthy event or situation, the primary religion discussed in the item and the image of that religion created by the coverage. Open-ended lists were used to keep track of subject matter and themes in the religion news items. In all cases, the unit of analysis was the item as a whole.

Because the Herald did not always separate items into separate stories, the length recorded was the number or column inches devoted to a discussion of religion. For an item devoted entirely to a single topic, the length was measured from the first line of the item through the last line. For those cases where unrelated topics were treated together without any form of typographical separation, only the actual length of the coverage devoted to religion was recorded and only that portion was analyzed.

Categories for recording item authorship included: James Gordon Bennett, probably Bennett, the New York staff, Herald correspondent, other correspondent, and other newspaper. Items were assigned to Bennett or to the New York staff on the basis of writing style, subject matter and placement within the newspaper with ambiguous cases being listed as "probably Bennett." Items were assigned to other categories on the basis of signatures and other identifying information printed in the newspaper. Obvious rewrites that were not directly attributed to a correspondent or to another newspaper were assigned to the New York staff.

Types of writing styles identified in this study included: news, serious commentary, satire, literature, and allusion. Because Herald items often mixed styles, only the main style was recorded. Thus an item that seemed primarily intended to convey information was coded as "news" even if it contained a small proportion of commentary. Similarly, items that appeared primarily intended to convey opinion or analysis were coded as "serious commentary" or "satire" even if they contained some news elements. "Satire" was used for items written in a mocking tone, that used exaggerated language or description, or for items that seemed to convey an idea or impression contrary to the manifest meaning or an impression that was at odds with Bennett's known opinion on the subject. A "serious commentary" offered an opinion, analysis or interpretation that seemed meant to be taken at face value. "Literature" items included both poetry and stories that were identified in the text

as probably untrue or that seemed fictional based on the content and on a lack of attribution to a source or identification of subjects. "Allusions" were defined as brief uses of religious language or passing references to the Bible or other religious literature embedded within items that otherwise had little or nothing to do with religion.

In this study satire and direct criticisms of religion or religious people and institutions were coded as conveying an "unfavorable" image of the religion that formed the subject of the item. In addition, items imputing or suggesting immorality, criminal behavior or hypocrisy and those reporting most kinds of conflict within or among religions were considered as "unfavorable" coverage. Items containing direct or implied praise were, of course, coded as creating a "favorable" image of the religion in question. The "mixed" category was used for those items that contained both criticism and praise of religion. The "neutral" category was used for those stories that were written primarily in what would now be called objective or straight news style. These items used neutral language and included no impressionistic descriptions or embedded commentary.

In creating these categories and assigning items to them, as well as in developing lists of religions, subjects and themes and in interpreting the religion news, this study of the Herald drew heavily on specialized histories of religion in America, histories

of American journalism and biographies of James Gordon Bennett (see Bibliography).

In spite of the ambiguities involved in coding the religion coverage in the Herald, a reliability check using both simple agreement and Scott's pi indicated excellent (≥.95) intracoder reliability Agreement with an outside coder on a random sample of 20 percent of the stories included in this study was also satisfactory (≥.75).

Findings

An examination of the 224 religion items contained in this study indicates that, taken as a whole, religion coverage in the Herald between 1836 and 1844 was more complex and less easily stereotyped as irreverent and critical of religion than the history books suggest.

The amount of attention to religion news varied greatly from time period to time period, apparently in response to events within the religious community and the flow of other news items. Coverage was at an all-time low (21 items; an average of 0.8 story per day of publication) in 1838. It was highest (80 items; an average of 2.6 stories per day of publication) in 1844.

Although the coverage was more satirical (see Table 1) and presented a less favorable image of religion (see Table 2) in 1836 than was true in later years, there was no clear trend across time. Instead, differences seem to be a response to events within the religious community and to societal conditions affecting religion. In general, however, the religion items became longer (see Table

3), more varied in terms of the number of religions covered (see Table 4) and the location of the news event (see Table 5) as Bennett became less dependent on his own reporting and writing for religion news coverage (see Table 6).

The Early Years (1836 and 1838): During the first full year the Herald was published, Bennett appears to have written almost all of the religion items. The coverage during that year was more satirical and therefore presented a more unfavorable image of religion than during any other year included in this study. Although slightly more than half the items were either news or serious commentary and approximately 40 percent presented either a neutral or favorable image of religion, the fact that two-thirds of the items were about events or issues in New York City suggests that the satire and criticism had a high potential for offending readers, particularly when one takes into account the subject matter of the religion items during this period.

Although approximately one-fourth of the items analyzed for 1836 were simple announcements or accounts of events within the religious community, Bennett lavished far more attention on controversy within the religious community and hypocrisy on the part of religious persons. In these items, Bennett seemed to poke gentle fun at disputes among clergy over doctrinal subtleties, while saving his real wrath for those who let money get in the way of what he considered true Christianity. Although self-serving motives undoubtedly played a role in Bennett's attacks on other newspaper editors

for professing to be Christian while publishing on the Sabbath, no such motive was easily discernible in other stories such as one bitterly satirizing an Episcopalian congregation for spending money on evergreens to decorate the church for the Christmas holidays.

As an example of Bennett's religion coverage, most histories cite his coverage of Maria Monk's "awful disclosures" of life in a nunnery. That coverage must have been excessive, for five items about it showed up in the sample. But if these items are representative of the coverage as a whole, the headlines in the Herald, like those in the National-Enquirer of today, promised far more than the paper actually delivered in the way of astonishing revelations of sex and violence in a Canadian convent.

In sharp contrast to the religion items that appeared in the Herald during 1836, coverage during 1838 was relatively rare but much more favorable in tone. More than two-thirds of the 21 religion items were either news or serious commentary. Although many of those items included a line or two of irreverent or satiric commentary, only about one-fifth were either satire or fiction. As a result of this abrupt shift in writing style, the image of religion presented in two-thirds of the items during 1838 was either neutral or favorable.

Three-fourths of the religion items appeared during the first four months of the year. During that period there were two articles poking fun of Bennett's own lack of conventional religiosity and several more satirizing Bennett's old nemesis, M.M. Noah of the

Courier and Enquirer, who at the time was attempting to establish a "New Israel" on Grand Island in the Niagara River. Another long article (more than 10 column inches) was devoted almost entirely to a listing of church services, but does include a paragraph of commentary about revivals that is both satirical and serious. The remaining stories, however, were almost entirely laudatory toward religion in general and toward specific congregations. These items include detailed accounts of sermons and congregational activities, a thorough description of a Jewish festival and several glowing accounts of a new Catholic church being built in New York City.

Religion news became a rare commodity after May 1 when Bennett sailed for Europe. During his absence, only four items (one of which seemed to have been written by him before he left town) appeared in the paper. The others were a brief report of the vote by a New England congregation on the abolition question, an update on Noah's religious adventures in establishing his New Israel, and an apparently fictional medical story that qualified as religion news only because the "information" was attributed to a Presbyterian minister.

After Bennett returned to New York in late October, religion items continued to be sca-c- Only two more religion items appeared, but unlike the coverage during the first four months of 1838, both were critical in tone. One reported unfavorably on Catholic involvement in separatist or revolutionary organizations in Canada; the other attempted to explain Bennett's own religious sentiments by contrast-

ing "true religion" with that practiced within the Episcopal church of New York City.

The Moral War (1840): In many ways the religion coverage during the year of the Moral War was an extension of that noted for 1838. Although more than twice as many religion items (48) appeared in 1840 as in 1838, approximately four-fifths were either news or serious commentary. Again, this serious coverage often included a line of irreverent commentary, but only about 10 percent of the coverage was comprised of clear-cut satire or fiction.

As was true during 1838, approximately two-thirds of the religion items appearing during 1840 presented either a favorable or neutral image of religion. However, during 1840 there was a slightly lower proportion of stories presenting a mixed image of religions and a slightly higher proportion of purely unfavorable coverage than was found in 1838. These differences can be attributed to the Moral War itself. Eight percent of all stories during 1840 questioned the Christianity of those newspapers or individuals who were crusading against Bennett and his Herald. Another 4 percent mixed attention to Noah's continuing attempt to establish a "New Israel" with Moral War themes.

During May and June, near the beginning of the Moral War, religion news nearly drove other kinds of coverage out of the paper. On each day in the sample, at least one-third of the available news space was devoted to religion. During these months long (>10 column inches) and primarily neutral accounts of important meetings

of religious organizations appeared along with almost equally lengthy attention to the Moral War, much of which was counted as religion news because of the charges of religious hypocrisy leveled against the participants. Interspersed with these long items were brief and primarily neutral or favorable mentions of minor events within the religious community.

However, there was little attention to any kind of religion news after mid-July. Bennett left town for his honeymoon; the Moral War died down. Furthermore, accounts of war in the Middle East and China began to replace other subject matter. During these latter months of 1840, most religion news was either brief announcements of minor local events or brief accounts of persecution of Jews in the Middle East.

The Later Years (1842 and 1844): An analysis of the religion items in the Herald indicates a striking difference between religion coverage before and during the Moral War and that which appeared in the Herald in the later years. However, that change cannot be attributed to the Moral War. Instead it is clearly the result of a change in news gathering methods. During these later years, Bennett probably wrote only about one-fourth of the religion items while more than one-third came from correspondents or from other newspapers. As a result, less than half the religion items during this period came from New York City whereas at least two-thirds of the religion news before and during the Moral War was primarily local news.

During 1842 commentary -- both serious and satire -- virtually disappeared from the Herald. Slightly more than four-fifths of the 39 religion items were primarily straight news. However, this shift from commentary to news did not produce decidedly more favorable coverage. In fact, the proportion of neutral and favorable items fell slightly from the levels found in 1838 and 1840.

Approximately two-thirds of the local news (12 items) consisted primarily of brief announcements or coverage of local events that presented a neutral or favorable impression of religion in New York City. In the remaining stories, however, Bennett and his reporters continued to give unfavorable coverage to ostensibly religious persons caught up in crimes or hypocritical behavior especially where money seemed to get in the way of Bennett's concept of morality. Bennett also continued to take an occasional potshot at those newspaper editors who continued their opposition to the Herald on moral grounds.

The religion items from elsewhere consisted primarily of brief accounts of the state of religion in various regions. Most of these items were embedded in a longer round-up sent to the Herald by its correspondents, but a few were much longer, running well over 10 column inches. These items were written in many different styles and presented varying images of religions depending on the nature of the news, the correspondent's own opinion and his impression of what would attract Bennett's attention.

Two correspondents from New England filed critical accounts of religious involvement in the growing anti-slavery movement; two others presented primarily neutral accounts of religious revivals in their areas while a third filed a satire that left an unfavorable impression of revival participants. In similar fashion, some news from Catholic areas and from the new Mormon settlement in Illinois created a favorable impression of those religions while other coverage was unfavorable or even satirical. Six regional correspondents, however, filed neutral or favorable accounts of the state of religion in their areas.

Coverage of religion during 1844 was again different than it was during any other year included in this study. Not only were there nearly twice as many items (80) treating more religions (17 vs. a previous high of 14 in 1842) as there had been in the past, but the items were also generally longer and more issue-oriented than in other years. Satire returned in full force; unfavorable coverage was higher (26 percent) than at any time since 1836 and purely favorable coverage reached an all-time low (15 percent).

Only about a third of the news from New York City was neutral or favorable coverage of purely local events. About one-fifth discussed criminal or immoral behavior on the part of religious persons in language more inflammatory than had been used at any time since the Maria Monk disclosures of 1836. Another one-fifth criticized denominationlism in general and conflict between Episcopalians and Puritans in particular. Slightly more than one-

fifth of the items criticized Catholics, Protestants and new philosophers (Fourier, Owens) who were attempting to combine religion and partisan politics.

In news from both New York and elsewhere in the United States, Catholics who were promoting a political party based on religion or who were attempting to garner support for political factions in Ireland received unfavorable press, but Catholicism itself was presented in neutral or favorable terms in several stories about mob violence in Philadelphia. On those occasions, the Herald saved its satire and criticism for the city government of Philadelphia, the Native American Party and those Protestants who participated in or condoned attacks on the Catholic community.

The purely national news followed a pattern similar to that of the local news. In both number and length of story, bad news outweighed good news about religion as Americans throughout the nation apparently struggled with the problems of denominationalism and personal freedom in what many had apparently seen as their own Protestant republic.

News of the Mormon community in Nauvoo, Illinois, was particularly heavy (8 items, 3 longer than 10 column inches). Although the sample included one highly critical letter by a reader who claimed to have first-hand knowledge of Mormonism in New York, the other coverage was either neutral or favorable. Bennett himself wrote a largely favorable editorial even though he injected a line or two critical of Mormon theology into other religion news items.

As was the case with coverage of Catholicism during the Philadelphia riots, Mormonism was treated in neutral terms in accounts of the Nauvoo massacre. Criticism went to the state of Illinois and its non-Mormon population.

Although the Mormon coverage contained an occasional line suggesting that Bennett and the Herald were somewhat suspicious of Joseph Smith's attempt to establish a theocracy at Nauvoo, the generally uncritical coverage of Mormonism stood in sharp contrast to that afforded other similar attempts to establish theocracies. Long articles and editorials treated Fourierism and the Millerites as threats to the nation, while three other stories continued to treat M.M. Noah's efforts to establish a New Israel as a joke.

Discussion

This analysis of religion journalism in the New York Herald suggests the coverage did change over time, but that change almost certainly cannot be ascribed to an attempt to allay criticism of the paper following the Moral War. The changes across time are nowhere near as strong or as clear as the differences in subject matter, writing style or image of religion that occur between any two time periods included in the study. To the extent that cause can be deduced from reading the pages of a single newspaper, it appears change came about more because of economic factors than because of social pressure from the participants in the Moral War.

The trend toward urbanization and industrialization allowed Bennett to attract and capitalize on a lower class audience who

had more to gain from Bennett's attacks on the Wall Street establishment than they did from the combination of "churches and banks" (ital. in original).[15] Emotionally and philosophically, most of his audience probably agreed with the Herald's overall support for an old-style Christianity that emphasized personal morality and community over the new Protestantism that seemed to equate true Christianity with money and empire.[16]

These lower class readers gave Bennett a power base that made him and his newspaper virtually immune to the long-term effects of any Moral War led by bankers, the Wall Street press and middle- and upper-class clergy. With daily pennies from this audience, he could accumulate the fortune that allowed him to expand newsgathering beyond New York City.

It was this change to newsgathering from correspondents and newspapers that did most to change the religion coverage, for it no longer depended solely on the enterprise and reporting and writing skills of one man. While Bennett's influence remained strong, additional news sources undoubtedly led to the greater variety in coverage, writing style and tone that mark the real difference between the religion journalism before the Moral War and that of the later years.

Thus it appears the Moral War was not responsible for a change in the Herald's coverage of religion. But whether the religion coverage contributed to the Moral War is more problematic. Histories of the era point out that covering religion was a new idea.

They also emphasize the criticism and satire sprinkled so liberally throughout the Herald.

Certainly systematic attention to religion in the secular press was a novelty, but criticism and satire directed at religions were not. Church leaders and laymen frequently engaged in criticism of their own church and of others. As Martin Marty points out, the denominationalism of the era did not lead to holy wars, but it did lead to much "unholy rhetoric."[17] And even Bennett's critics were undoubtedly familiar with the satires of religion in Benjamin Franklin's Silence Dogood letters to the New England Courant.

But criticism from within the religious community is almost always done from a religious perspective to defend one's own religion or correct perceived errors in belief and practice. Franklin's satires were written in a style that evidenced "sheer wit and playfulness."[18] Under the cover of a woman's name, he could be "shrill and scolding" without being threatening.[19] Franklin's satire invited readers to smile with him at common religious foibles.

Bennett, however, was different. He wrote under his own name and his satire was blunt, direct and personal. It did not smile at anything or invite others to smile along with the author.

But what was most radical and perhaps most unsettling to many in the community was the perspective from which Bennett covered religion. Bennett wrote from the perspective of an outsider. A man who was acquainted with members of high political and financial circles, Bennett never tired of telling his readers that he was

Scotch, not American, or pointing out to them that he had nothing to gain from any political or financial deals.

This outsider's perspective extended to his attitude to religion. Bennett was undoubtedly more religious than his critics cared to admit. He constantly reminded his readers that he considered atheism an absurdity.[20] But he also constantly pointed out that he was not Protestant but Catholic, and an independent sort of Catholic. "In matters of faith," he explained,

> I am an enthusiast. I believe in the Virgin and all that belongs to her... (but) Religion -- true religion -- consists not in eating or drinking -- not in high salaries -- not in hanging around the aprons of rich old women -- not in presuming to judge the opinions of others beyond what their acts will justify. Neither does true religion -- or real Christianity consist in believing the dogmas of any church -- or the ipse dixit of any set of men. The Bible is before me. Have I not a right to read that book -- to draw out from it religious opinions and a church of my own?...[21]

From that perspective, Bennett chose to ignore the finer points of doctrine in order to concentrate on the effects of religious beliefs and practices. In his writings he rarely engaged in doctrinal debates although he occasionally covered them from the perspective of a bemused and somewhat critical observer. Instead, he scrutinized all religions for behavioral consequences.

As a result, Bennett's coverage of religion was both polemical and even-handed. No religion that was the focus of at least three stories in this study received consistently unfavorable coverage;

none consistently got good press. Wherever Bennett found religious people living in harmony, promoting the good of society or behaving according to his admittedly idiosyncratic vision of true religion, he offered support and praise. But whenever Bennett perceived threats to individual religious freedom or found religion combining with business or politics in a way that could harm individuals or cause social or political instability, his criticism was strong and sometimes heavy-handed.

This essentially secular and even-handed analysis and critique of any and all religion made Bennett's religion coverage truly radical. It must also have been quite unsettling at the time. In many ways it argued against the "progress" of the times which was beginning to equate Christianity with money and power. Thus it is not surprising that the accounts of the causes of the Moral War reported in the Herald and preserved and given varying emphases in history books attack the Herald's content and style from moral, economic and political perspectives. Bennett's religious, political and economic coverage were intertwined and his philosophies in all three areas were generally at odds with the equally intertwined beliefs of his opponents.

At the time the perspective of an outside observer and critic of the consequences of religion may have been the morally objectionable feature of Bennett's religion coverage, but even in his own era Bennett's method of covering religion had its supporters. In a book that is too laudatory of Bennett and his work to be entirely

credible, Bennett's contemporary, Isaac Pray, seems best to have captured the nature and the enduring contribution of Bennett's religion journalism. As Pray put it, because of Bennett's systematic attention to religion

> Less is thought of the saving grace and efficiency of mere creeds and dogmas, and more of practical piety of life, and of the exercise of real virtues...
>
> This has been accomplished by the justice that has been administered to each sect, while the public mind has been protected from running into those extremes of enthusiasm and fanaticism which always react, sooner or later, with terrible force upon society...
>
> The occasional tendencies to unite Church and State have been checked always by a determined exposition of them, and by a zealous opposition to every effort to depart from the highest and best regulation of republican government...
>
> Mr. Bennett has watched faithfully the course to which the action of the clergy, in some cases, has been tending, and he has been on the side of the republic....He has done a duty to the country which can be traced throughout his whole course, although the superficial observer may lose sight of the fact from not making an attempt to analyze the motives which have prompted his actions in a thousand apparently trivial and unimportant instances. No wonder is it that he should have given offense frequently, for those who have felt most keenly his satire and ridicule have most quickly discerned the reason which has given these cunning weapons edge and point.[22]

Styles in journalism have changed since Bennett's time. Today satire and fiction would be unwelcome in most newspapers; Biblical allusions would be lost on many contemporary readers. Still what in the 1830s and '40s may have been the most morally objectionable feature of Bennett's journalism today appears to be its strength.

A reading of Bennett's religion journalism clearly indicates that systematic attention to religion, to its behavioral consequences and to its interplay with business and politics can help a society define itself and focus attention on problems that may need to be addressed. It can also make very good reading.

Table 1

Style of Writing Used In Religion Items in the Herald, 1836-1844

	Year				
Style of Writing	1836[a] (n=36)	1838 (n=21)	1840[a] (n=48)	1842 (n=39)	1844[a] (n=80)
News	30.6%	61.9%	73.0%	82.1%	70.1%
Serious Commentary	16.7%	19.0%	12.5%	5.1%	15.1%
Satire	30.6%	14.3%	6.3%	5.1%	10.0%
Allusion[b]	2.8%	--	4.2%	5.1%	1.3%
Literature[c]	19.4%	4.8%	4.2%	2.6%	3.8%

Chi Square = 39.99, d.f. = 16, p = .00

Cramer's V = .21, p = .00

[a]Total does not equal 100% because of rounding.

[b]This category includes all items with only a brief mention of a word associated with religion or an allusion to the Bible or religious literature.

[c]This category includes both poetry and fiction.

Table 2

Image of Religion Presented by Religion Items in the Herald, 1836-1844

Image	Year 1836 (n=36)	1838[a] (n=21)	1840 (n=48)	1842 (n=39)	1844[a] (n=80)
Unfavorable	36.1%	14.3%	20.8%	23.1%	26.3%
Mixed	22.2%	23.8%	16.7%	20.5%	21.3%
Neutral	13.9%	28.6%	29.2%	25.6%	37.5%
Favorable	27.8%	33.3%	33.3%	30.8%	15.0%

Chi Square = 14.32, d.f. = 12, n.s.

Cramer's V = .15, n.s.

[a]Total does not equal 100% because of rounding.

Table 3

Length of Religion Items in the Herald, 1836-1844

Length (Column Inches)	Year 1836 (n=36)	1838 (n=21)	1840 (n=48)	1842[a] (n=39)	1844[a] (n=80)
Less than 1 inch	27.8%	28.6%	37.5%	48.7%	28.8%
1-3 inches	36.1%	28.6%	22.9%	33.3%	25.0%
3-5 inches	13.9%	4.8%	4.2%	5.1%	7.5%
5-10 inches	11.1%	19.0%	8.3%	7.7%	6.3%
Over 10 inches	11.1%	19.0%	27.1%	5.1%	32.5%

Chi Square = 24.17, d.f. 16, p = .08

Cramer's V = .16, p = .08

[a]Total does not equal 100% because of rounding.

Table 4

Religions Covered in the Herald, 1836-1844

Religion[a]	Year 1836 (n=36)	1838[a] (n=21)	1840 (n=48)	1842[a] (n=39)	1844[a] (n=80)
Christian (general)	33.3%	14.3%	18.8%	10.3%	7.8%
Protestant (general)	19.4%	19.0%	29.2%	28.2%	11.3%
Roman Catholic	27.8%	28.6%	8.3%	15.4%	17.5%
Judaism	2.8%	19.0%	8.3%	2.6%	6.3%
Methodist	8.3%	4.8%	12.5%	5.1%	10.0%
Unitarian & Universalist	2.8%	--	2.1%	2.6%	3.8%
Episcopalian	5.6%	4.8%	2.1%	12.8%	17.5%
Baptist	--	4.8%	8.3%	2.6%	3.8%
Mormon	--	--	2.1%	5.1%	8.8%
Presbyterian/ Calvinist	--	--	8.3%	5.1%	--
New Philosophies[c]	--	--	--	--	7.6%
Other Denominations[d]	--	4.8%	--	10.3%	5.2%

Chi Square = 80.32, d.f. 44, p = .00
Cramer's V = .30, p = .00

[a]Total does not equal 100% because of rounding.

[b]Only the main religion discussed in an item is counted in this table. If several religions were mentioned equally in the same item, the first one mentioned was coded.

[c]This category includes Fourier, Owen, Miller and "mesmerism."

[d]Denominations that appeared only once in the entire sample are included in this category.

Table 5

Geographic Location of Religion Items in the Herald, 1836-1844

Location	Year 1836[a] (n=36)	1838[a] (n=21)	1840[a] (n=48)	1842 (n=39)	1844[a] (n=80)
New York City	63.9%	81.0%	66.7%	41.0%	48.8%
United States	2.8%	14.3%	20.8%	51.3%	40.0%
Canada	13.9%	4.8%	2.1%	--	5.0%
Texas & Latin America	2.8%	--	2.1%	2.6%	--
Europe	5.6%	--	2.1%	--	3.8%
Africa & Asia	--	--	4.2%	5.1%	1.3%
None[b]	11.1%	--	2.1%	--	1.3%

Chi Square = 62.82, d.f. 32, p = .00

Cramer's V = .26, p = .00

[a]Total does not equal 100% because of rounding.

[b]This category includes poetry, fiction and miscellaneous religious commentaries which could not be associated with a particular geographic location.

Table 6

Authorship of Religion Items in the Herald, 1836-1844

Author	Year 1836 (n=36)	1838[a] (n=21)	1840[a] (n=48)	1842[a] (n=39)	1844[a] (n=80)
James Gordon Bennett	86.1%	66.7%	31.3%	5.1%	8.8%
Probably Bennett[b]	8.3%	14.3%	33.3%	20.5%	18.8%
Herald Staff (New York)[c]	--	14.3%	14.6%	28.2%	33.8%
Herald Correspondent	--	4.8%	16.7%	33.3%	12.5%
Other Correspondent	5.6%	--	2.1%	7.7%	8.8%
Other Newspaper	--	--	2.1%	5.1%	17.5%

Chi Square = 128.38, d.f. = 24, p = .00

Cramer's V = .38, p = .00

[a]Total does not equal 100% because of rounding.

[b]This category included items that could not be attributed to Bennett or to his reporters based on writing style, subject and placement within newspaper.

[c]This category contains obvious rewrites that could not clearly be attributed to a correspondent or to another newspaper.

Footnotes

1. Martin Marty, Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America (New York: The Dial Press, 1970) pp. 15, 101-132.

2. David G. Bromley and Anson D. Shupe, Jr., Strange Gods (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981) pp. 9-11; Marty, op.cit., pg. 106.

3. Marty, op. cit., pp. 69. 102-104, 121-122.

4. Marty, op. cit., pg. 107.

5. Marty, op. cit., pg. 107-108.

6. Edwin Emery and Michael Emery, The Press and America: An Interpretative History of the Mass Media (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 5th ed. 1984) pp. 140-146.

7. Emery and Emery, op. cit., 144, 146

8. Isaac Pray, Memoirs of James Gordon Bennett and His Times (New York: Stringer and Townsend, 1855) pp. 58-59, 84-85, 94, 106-112, 130-132, 136-150; Frederic Hudson, Journalism in the United States from 1690 to 1872 (New York: Haskill House, reprint ed. 1968) p. 446.

9. Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism (New York: The Macmillan Co., 3rd ed. 1962) pg. 235.

10. Willard G. Bleyer, History of America Journalism (New York: DeCapo Press, 1973) pg. 193; see also Sidney Kobre, Development of American Journalism (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1969) pg. 235.

11. Emery and Emery, op. cit., pp. 144, 146.

12. Don Carlos Seitz, The James Gordon Bennetts -- Father and Son, Proprietors of the New York Herald (New York: Beckman Publishers, 1974) pp. 66-86; Hudson, op. cit., 453-456; Pray, op. cit., pp. 261-282.

13. Seitz, op. cit., pg. 70.

14. Terry Mattingly, "Religion News: No Room at the Inn," Quill 71(1):12-19. January 1983; The Religion Beat: The Reporting of Religion in the Media, Conference Report, The Rockefeller Foundation, August 1981; Joanmarie Kalter, "The Greatest Stories Never Told . . . Right," TV Guide reprint, November 16, 1985; John Brice, "Guiding Lights," Public Relations Journal 42(1):20-25. January 1986.

15. Gustav Unonius, quoted in Marty, op. cit., pg. 109-110.

16. Marty, op. cit., pp. 101-110.

17. Marty, op. cit., pg. 71.

18. Herbert W. Schneider, "Ungodly Puritans," in Charles L. Sanford, Benjamin Franklin and the American Character (New York: D.C. Heath and Co., 1955) pg. 78.

19. James A. Sappenfield, A Sweet Instruction: Franklin's Journalism as a Literary Apprenticeship (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973) pg. 35.

20. James Gordon Bennett, quoted in Pray, op. cit., pg 276.

21. James Gordon Bennett, "Religion and Salvation," New York Herald, December 14, 1838, pg. 2; see also Pray, op. cit., pp. 276-279; Seitz, op. cit., 85-

22. Pray, op. cit., pp. 474-475.

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